

Staff Recommendation Preferred Alternative Merced to Fresno Section

December 13, 2011



Merced to Fresno High-Speed Train Section



Recent Milestones – Merced to Fresno Section

- **Published Draft EIR/EIS on August 15, 2011.**
- **The 60-day extended comment period concluded on October 13, 2011.**
- **Considered the comments and technical EIR/EIS findings in the identification of the Preferred Alternative.**
- **Staff Report on Preferred Alternative released December 1, 2011.**

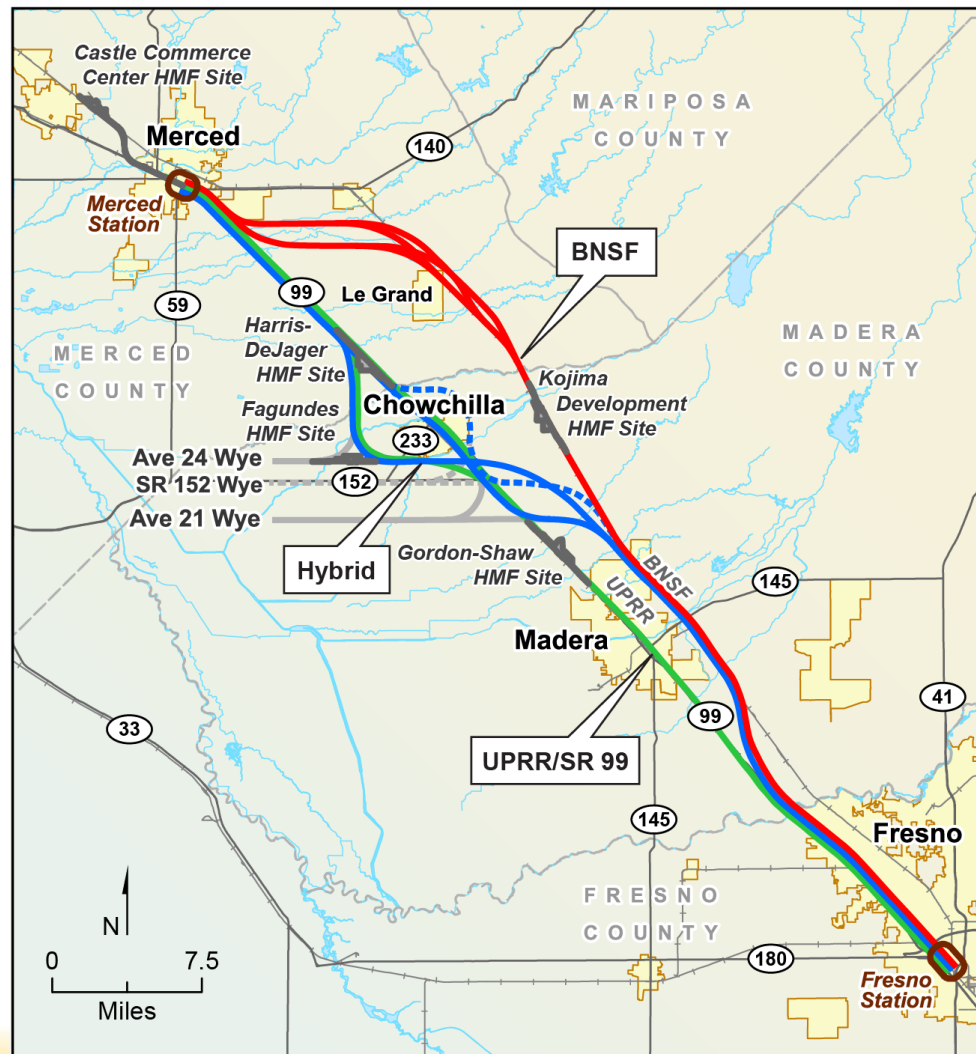
Comments on Draft EIR/EIS

- 2,657 Comment Submittals (of which nearly 1,800 were from Madera Friends of High Speed Rail)
 - Most comments were from individuals.
 - Main issues of concern: community impacts, private property impacts, agricultural impacts, economic impacts.
- Local Government Comments
 - City of Merced and Merced County support the UPRR/SR99 Alternative.
 - City of Chowchilla supports the BNSF Alternative.
 - City of Madera supports the BNSF and the Hybrid alternatives, whereas the County supports the UPRR/SR 99 Alternative and SR152 Wye.
 - City of Fresno prefers the Mariposa Street Station Alternative.

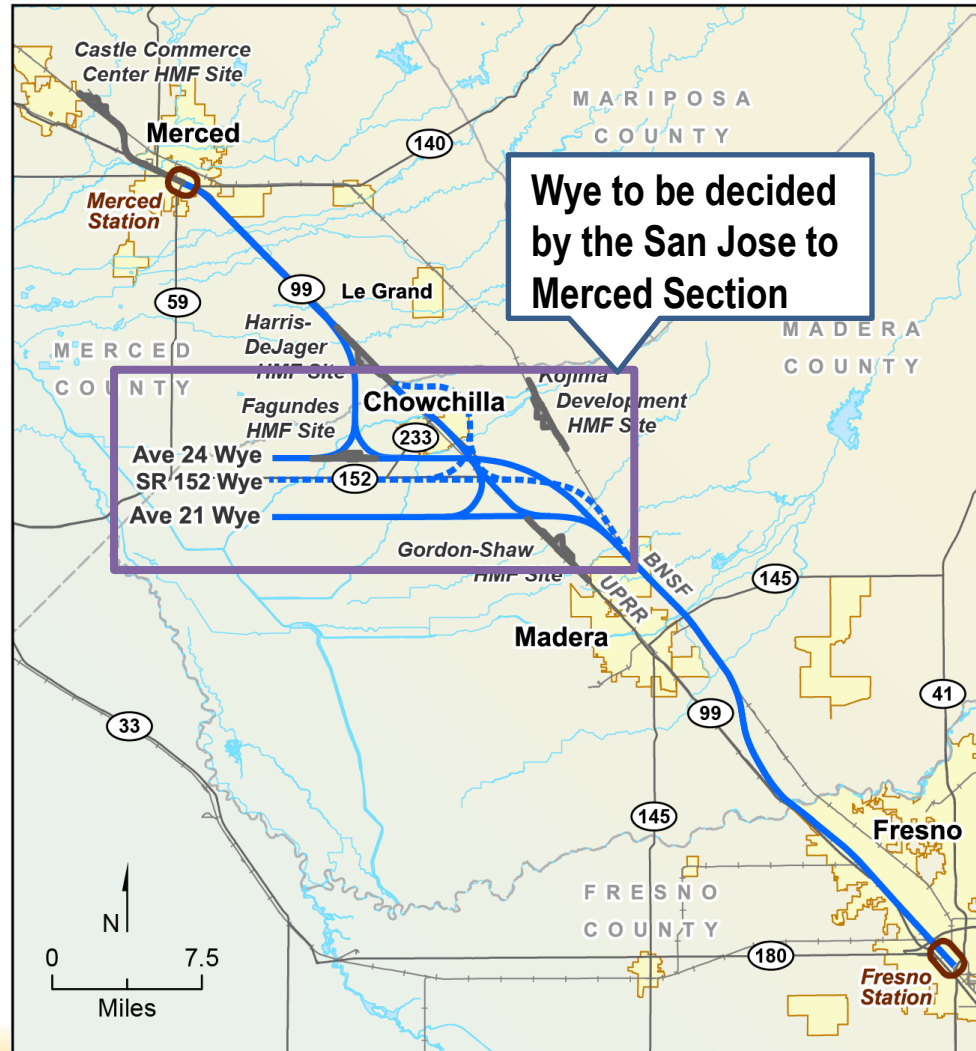
Comments on Draft EIR EIS

- Federal Agencies and Tribes
 - Letters received from EPA, USACE, NOAA, Amtrak, U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Department of the Interior.
 - None of the federal agencies that commented expressed support for a particular alternative.
- State Agencies' Issues Varied
 - California State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has concerns over the BNSF and Hybrid alternatives with Ave 24 Wye.
 - University of California-Merced supports the UPRR/SR 99 Alternative.
 - Other organizations commented uniquely on their resource specialty.

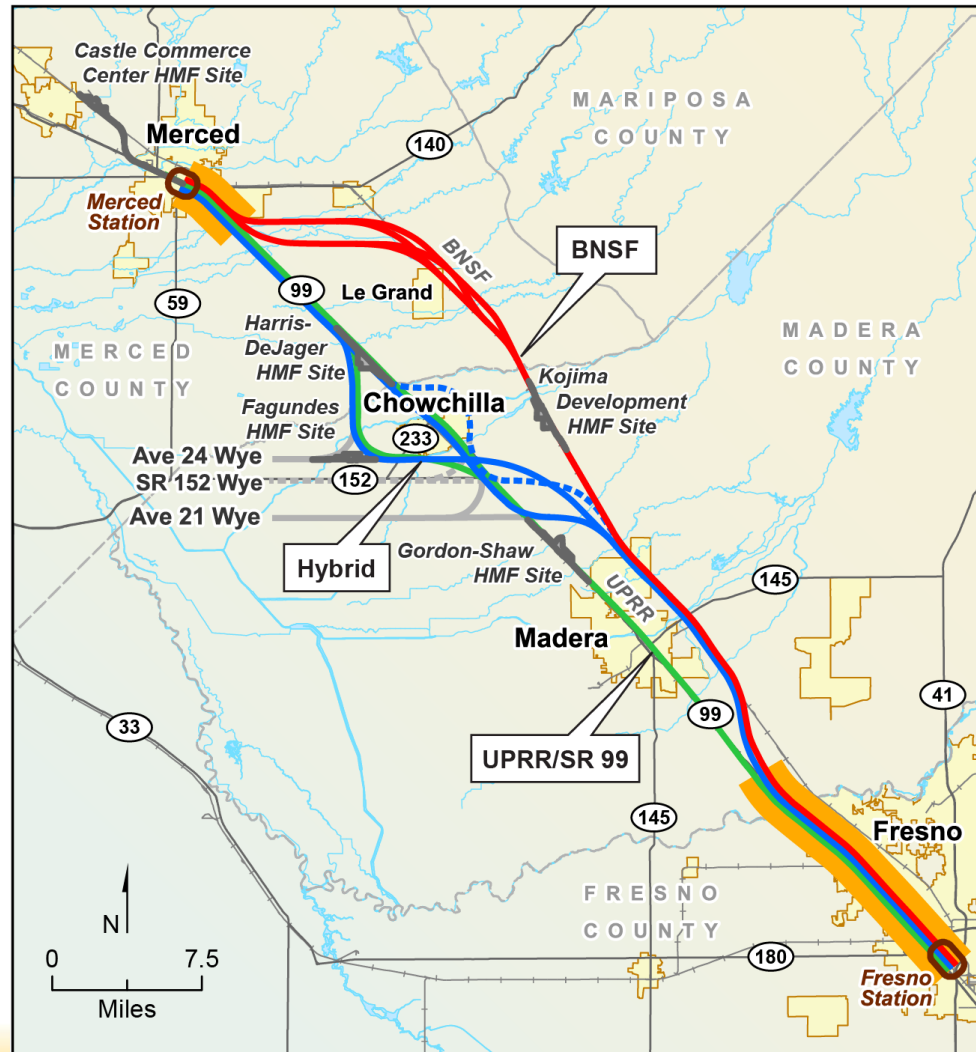
Alternatives Evaluated



Preferred North-South Alignment



Preferred North-South Alignment



Alternatives Evaluated – Decision North of the Wyes



**Sensitive
Ecosystem
Resources**



**Rural and Agricultural
Considerations**

Alternatives Evaluated – Decision South of the Wyes

Madera
Residential
Areas



Madera Business
District

Resource Categories	Range of Natural Resource Impacts by HST Alternative due to Wyes and Design Options		
	UPRR/ SR 99 Alternative	Hybrid Alternative	BNSF Alternative
Biological Resources- Habitat (acres)	198/1,879 – 221/1,999	301/2,147 – 303/2,291	355/2,339 – 453/2,496
Biological Resources-Waters of the U.S. (acres)	28 – 33	35 – 37	35 – 46
Biological Resources-Vernal Pools (acres)	1 – 2	5	9 – 14
Biological Resources-Riparian Communities (acres)	5 – 16	5 – 13	5 – 11
Biological Resources - No. of Conservation Areas	1	1	2
Biological Resources-Wildlife Crossings (miles)	3.6 – 4.1	3.6 – 4.1	6.1 – 6.8

Resource Categories	Range of Community Impacts by HST Alternative due to Wyes and Design Options		
	UPRR/ SR 99 Alternative	Hybrid Alternative	BNSF Alternative
Operation Community Impacts			
Acquisitions – Residential (units)	255 – 285	235 – 262	246 – 273
Acquisitions – Business (units)	311 – 323	228 – 249	245 – 260
Noise and Vibration – Residences (units)	810 – 884	220 – 419	421 – 467
Noise and Vibration - Institutional Facilities	3 – 4	1	1
Transportation - Road Closures	20 – 25	30 – 37	27 – 42
Transportation – Impediments to Infrastructure			
State Facilities – Correctional Facilities	0	0 – 1	0 – 1
Community Resources – Miles within Urban Limits	17.4 – 19.2	12 – 15.6	12 – 15.5
Agricultural Lands – Prime Farmlands (acres)	262 – 314	283 – 299	317 – 470

Resource Categories	Range of Community Impacts by HST Alternative due to Wyes and Design Options		
	UPRR/ SR 99 Alternative	Hybrid Alternative	BNSF Alternative
Operation Community Impacts - Continued			
Agricultural Lands – Important Farmlands (acres)	751 – 854	992 – 1,137	941 – 1,164
Agricultural Lands – Dairies Affected	1 – 7	3 – 7	1 – 5
Parks, Recreation and Open Space – Number of Parks	3	1	1
Visual/Aesthetic Resources – Landscape Units	3	2	5
Visual/Aesthetic Resources – Miles of Elevated Track	32 – 41	15 – 17	21 – 24
Construction Community Impacts			
Parks, Recreation and Open Space – Closures	3	1	1
Schools – Within 0.25 Miles	16	13	13 – 14
Biological Resources – Temporary Disturbance	NA	NA	NA
Air Quality – Construction-related Pollutant Emissions	Highest	Lowest	Mid-range

Identification of the Hybrid Alternative as the Preferred North-South Alignment

- **Constructability**
 - **UPRR/SR 99 Alternative:** Longest elevated guideway, most miles through urban areas, highest number of modifications to the state highway facilities (8), 6 to 10 railroad crossings, long crossings of existing facilities that are difficult and more costly to construct.
 - **BNSF Alternative:** Moderate amount of elevated guideway, 5 modifications to state highway facilities, long crossings of existing facilities that are difficult and costly to construct, 6 to 10 railroad crossings, complex construction in Madera Acres.
 - **Hybrid Alternative:** minimal interaction with urban areas, least amount of elevated guideway, 3 modifications to state highway facilities, fewest railroad crossings (3), crosses SR 99 and the UPRR at favorable angles, least impact on urban and residential communities.

Cost by Alternative

From Highest to Lowest Cost:

- UPRR/SR 99 Alternative: \$5.3 to \$6.7 Billion
- BNSF Alternative: \$4.3 to \$4.8 Billion
- Hybrid Alternative: \$3.8 to \$4.8 Billion

The Hybrid Alternative would cost more than \$1 billion less than UPRR/SR 99 Alternative and up to \$450 million less than BNSF Alternative.

Identification of the Hybrid Alternative as the Preferred North-South Alignment

- **Travel Time and Ridership**
 - All alternatives would have same ridership – stations are common to all alternatives.
 - All alternatives would be within 30 seconds along mainline between San Francisco and Los Angeles.
 - Only the BNSF Alternative would be as much as 4 minutes slower between the Bay Area and north to Merced Station.

Preferred Merced and Fresno HST Stations

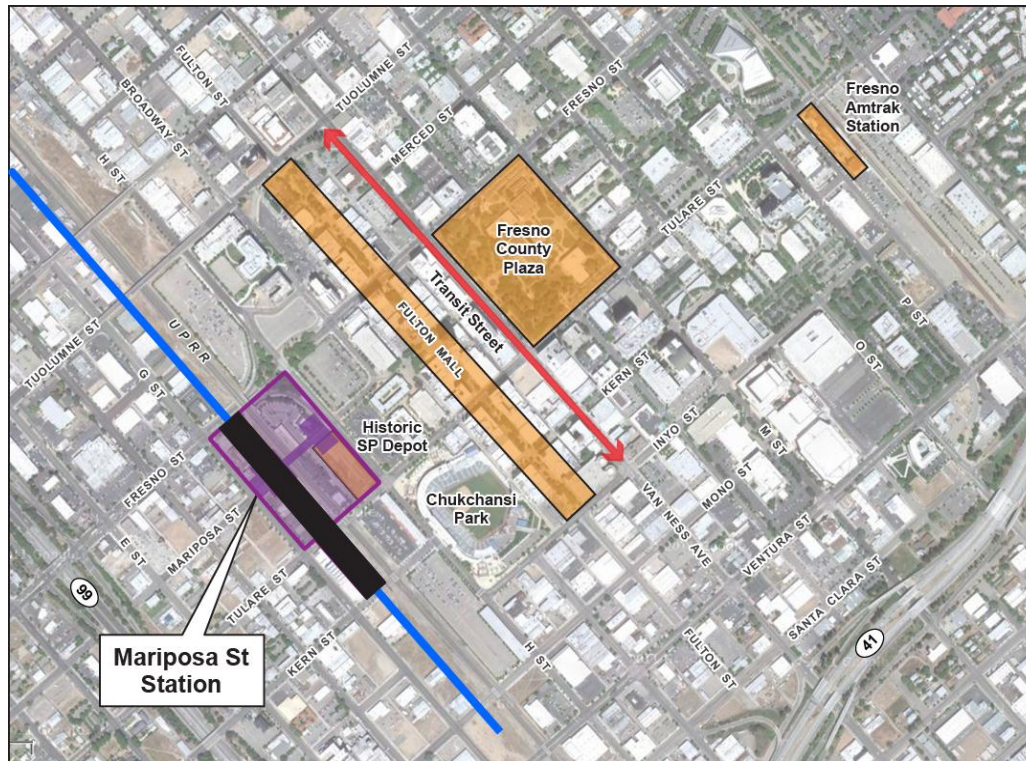


Merced Station Selection Process



- Meets Merced land use and transit connectivity objectives.
- Multiple station refinements incorporated Merced's input.
- Low traffic impact, easy accessibility from regional network.

Preferred Downtown Fresno Station



- Fresno's preferred station.
- Strong axial connection with downtown core (Mariposa Plaza open space, Courthouse, Transit Center).
- Best complements transit-oriented planning efforts.

Next Steps

- **Publish Final EIR/EIS (Feb).**
- **LEDPA confirmation by COE (Jan/Feb)**
- **Certification of EIR and Notice of Determination by Board (Mar/Apr)**
- **Record of Decision by FRA (Apr)**
- **Final design and permitting (2012/2013)**
- **Property acquisition begins (Dec 2012)**

Staff Recommendation

- The staff requests the Board to concur with:
 - The Hybrid Alternative identified as the Preferred North-South Alignment Alternative.
 - The Downtown Merced Station Alternative.
 - The Mariposa Station Alternative for Downtown Fresno.
 - No preferred alternative for the wye option be identified as part of this document.
 - No preferred alternative for a Heavy Maintenance Facility (HMF) site be identified as part of this document.

Relationship to Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR/EIS and Recent Court Decisions

- Merced to Fresno Draft EIR/EIS – based on Bay Area access via Pacheco Pass.
- Superior Court rulings in *Atherton* lawsuits require Authority to rescind programmatic decision on Pacheco Pass, do additional CEQA analysis on specific issues, and make a new programmatic decision.
- Identification of preferred alternative for the Merced to Fresno Section can proceed because
 - Preferred alternative identification is to inform content of Final EIR/EIS – not final decision or commitment.
 - North-south alignment alternatives and stations do not preclude Altamont Pass.
 - Decision on wye and east-west connection to Pacheco Pass **not** part of today's recommendation.
- A different programmatic decision could result in need for additional project-level analysis within Merced to Fresno section and adjustment of preferred alternative.